

# Desert Storm

## BEYOND THE MIRAGE

*Reserve officer's book, video delve into the notion of 'conviction.'*

**By Jerry Johnston**

Deseret News staff writer

Since his Desert Storm tour of duty as a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserve, J.T. Terranova has grown fascinated with the notion of "conviction." Who has it? When did they find it? How do they put it to work? How is it lost?

Now he feels his three-year project — a videotape and accompanying nonfiction work called "Mirage: The Soldiers' Story of Desert Storm" — supplies a few answers.

In the preface to his book he writes:

*During the war, I was continually surprised to see people whom I had seen as weak, rise to the occasion in times of stress. I saw female soldiers, determined not to let physical limitations stand in their way, out-perform men twice their size. I saw many of the young, inexperienced soldiers demonstrate more competence and commitment than their senior NCOs — and saw these leaders' failure of will sometimes jeopardize missions and endanger lives.*

"I guess I've found a niche for myself," Terranova says today. "I enjoy writing about people with conviction."

Terranova's own force of will brought the project off. It's an impressive first outing for an author. True, much of the book — with its

extensive detail and journal entries — may be a bit "high-fiber" for people who like a breezy read, and the video suffers somewhat from being built around still photographs. But just the fact the author was able to cobble it all together and get it before the public is a testament to human determination.

"I did about a year's worth of research before I started writing," Terranova says. "I recorded taped interviews with the soldiers who were with me. I'd get two sources on everything. I wanted everything to be exact. I knew if I made one error there would be five guys on me saying, 'That isn't true.' I even camped at some of the guys' houses for days at a time just to talk with them."

Bill Skinner, who is now a sergeant first class in the reserves, feels the book works well as both a historical document and a readable book. "People who weren't acquainted with the reserves will learn a lot," he says. "We've had a couple of reunions since Desert Storm. And the book and video bring back both good and bad memories for the soldiers."

Adds Chin Onwuegbu, another soldier under Terranova's command: "When he'd meet with us he'd have his tape recorder with him and just ask us to start talking about what happened. I don't know how long it all took him."

Many, many moons.

But the hard part wasn't ordering the information; it was bringing it back in a narra-

**Chin Onwuegbu**

tive format, turning it into a book. All the information Terranova provided without relying on

The book's close-up returns to Saigon the style:

*All across the valley, the crackle in the distance formed a soft dome. The snowcaps of the mountains sketched the edge of the horizon. It took a deep breath. Closing his eyes,*





J.T. Terranova display Desert Storm painting, video and book.

g information into story. is true. And — as points out — he did it a lick of profanity. g graphs, where Terra- Lake City, are typical of

ley, lights seemed to winter night. Their glow over the city; beyond it, Oquirrh Mountains of the valley. The lieutenant of cold air. he could almost see the

*blinding white light of the desert sun refracting on the sand. He saw the carnage of Medina Ridge, the long line of refugees coiling away into the distance, the belongings they had abandoned by the side of the road. He saw Harry, and the seemingly endless plains of the Middle East. . .*

"Still, you can't live in the past," Terranova says today. "You have to change and grow. I'm something of a pacifist now. What I want to do is write more about the human will, about the way conviction can turn us into something better than we thought we could be."

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